

Justice Department Implements New In-Person Work Policy



The U.S. Department of Justice Introduces a Change in Work Structure

In response to a directive from the White House to enhance in-person work at federal agencies, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) is set to implement a policy change affecting its employees, particularly attorneys, nationwide. According to Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco, this change is intended to foster a more cohesive and connected workforce.

Policy Adjustments Effective from January 14th

Commencing on January 14th, the DOJ will enact revisions to the existing telework procedures that have been in place since the onset of the pandemic. These adjustments will primarily impact legal divisions within the DOJ and various other offices. Some employees at Main Justice and U.S. attorney's offices have previously been required to work in the office for just one or two days a week.

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Granting Discretion in Compliance

The new policy grants individual components within the DOJ the authority to grant exceptions to the mandatory in-person work requirements. These exceptions are expected to consider the evolving landscape of post-pandemic work conditions. Criteria for these exceptions include retaining specialized workers, recruiting individuals for hard-to-fill positions, and addressing office space constraints. These exceptions will balance the need for in-person presence and the advantages of remote work.

Potential Impact on the Legal Workforce

While certain law enforcement personnel, like FBI agents and Bureau of Prisons employees, have not had remote work options during the pandemic, this policy shift can alienate a legal workforce that has grown accustomed to greater flexibility. The DOJ Gender Equality Network, an employee organization representing 1,500 members, expressed concerns earlier this year that increased mandatory office days could adversely affect productivity and staff retention.

Mixed Reactions from Employee Groups

Colleen Phillips, the acting president of the DOJ Gender Equality Network, expressed disappointment regarding the DOJ's decision to revert to pre-pandemic telework levels. While the network appreciated the allowance for some employees to maintain extensive telework options, the requirement of six in-person workdays does not align with the standards set by most other federal agencies. They believe this could negatively impact the DOJ's ability to attract and retain a diverse and highly skilled workforce.

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Informed Decision-Making

Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco's announcement highlighted that the policy changes were informed by recommendations from an internal working group and feedback from over 8,000 DOJ employees through surveys. The new policy aligns with the White House Office of Management and Budget directive, which aims to increase in-person work while accommodating various flexible work schedules, including remote work and situational telework.

Diverse Telework Policies Across the DOJ

The DOJ, with its 115,000 employees, maintains a range of telework policies based on the nature of the employees' positions and the specific needs of their offices. As the pandemic subsided last year, leadership granted components the discretion to adopt approaches that best suited their circumstances. For instance, attorneys in the Civil and Civil Rights divisions were required to report in person twice every two-week pay period. In contrast, those in the Antitrust and Tax divisions were generally directed to come in for four days per two-week period, as per a DOJ Gender Equality Network survey conducted last year.

Don't be a silent ninja! Let us know your thoughts in the comment section below.